Re-imagining Bertolt Brecht, redefining British Theatre: Oladipo Agboluaje's *Mother Courage*

Since 1979, among significant productions of Mother Courage that have been staged with predominantly black casts are included: Ntozake Shange's successful American production staged on May 13, 1980 that sets the play at the American frontier during the Reconstruction period of the late nineteenth century; Joanitta Bewulira-Wandera's *Maama Nalukalala Ne'zzade Lye* (Mother Courage and Her Children),first staged at the National Theatre, Kampala in 2009, which also toured in United Kingdom, U.S.A and South Africa; and Oladipo Agboluaje's *Mother Courage* first produced at Nottingham Playhouse on 6 February 2004. An analysis of these adaptation, each relating to its political and social context, suggests that by constructing a link between the past and present theatrically, the playwrights are demonstrating that memory and political resistance are alive in theatre and continue to inform and shape dramatic works. Agboluaje's reworked *Mother Courage* is a good reminder of the 'classical' text as a complex shifting concept acknowledged and used in various ways.

Commissioned and staged by Eclipse Theatre Ltd., under the guidance of Josette Bushell-Mingo, the African adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*, starring Carmen Munroe as Mother Courage, premiered at the Nottingham Playhouse on 6 February 2004, before touring other theatres in Bristol, Manchester, Cheltenham, Birmingham, Northampton, Ipswich, Mold and Liverpool. Through his aesthetic response, Oladipo Agboluaje, alienated from Africa in space and time, develops a theatrical style that transforms him into a 'local' artist. The play's narrative resonates with late twentieth century African history and the memories of a cross-

section of the audience. Set in an imaginary war zone that lies adjacent to Liberia and Sierra Leone in contemporary Africa, the play centres on Mother Courage, Bola Fagburu (Anna Fierling) and her ‘genetically modified’ mammy-wagon (Agboluaje, p. 2), who has the characteristics of a West African woman mammy-wagon trader. With her three children from ethnically diverse backgrounds, Eket Messu Essien (Eilif Nojocki), Opoku (Swiss Cheese), Ngozi (Kattrin), Mother Courage, embedded with various warring ethnic rebel groups and peace keeping forces, traverses the West African countries. In one sense, the play inherits other Brechtian characters and themes, for example: Ashewo Ajegunle (Yvette), General Mensah (General), the rebel Dancing Hyenas Revolutionary Forces, and Field Marshal Jigawa of the West Africa Union of Independent States. To the ‘initiate’ audience, the mammy-wagon is critical to the meaning of the play; it signifies a lorry with a wooden body as well as the market women who originally owned the largest number of these multi-purpose vehicles. In Yoruba language, Mother Courage’s name, Fagburu, is equivalent to 'hustler' - signifying her unscrupulous business methods while Ashewo Ajegunle[1] translates as 'the prostitute of Ajegunle', a slum area of Lagos. In a series of scenes, Mother Courage’s dialogue explores her experience of the vicissitudes of war, as well as the politics underlying the motives of the warring factions. In the play, Agboluaje questions these characters, presenting them as complex diverse ways, contributing to the diaspora’s cultural, social as well as Africa’s political history. In this context, Mother Courage, herself a veteran of these conflicts, blames the complex intersection of

[1] 'Ashewo Ajegunle' is the name of a popular song: Ashewo Ajegunle / *Yakari* / Ashewo Ajegunle / *Yakari* / When I ask her for love / She say, 'Brother, I dey for college'. / Oh-oh / Oh-oh / Ashewo Ajegunle / *Yakari*

religion, ethnicity, and institutional corruption. Agboluaje creates performances spaces of cultural and political haunting, where the colonial ghosts occupy the in-between spaces, linking the past and the present, boundaries and nation states, and national and ethnic identities. This paper examines how a post-colonial reworking of *Mother Courage* inherits Brechtian characters and themes, but locates them to a West African cultural and geographical context in order to interrogate concerns over conflict, corruption, ethnic violence, migration, and NGOism.

African British performances and dramas mutually share their collective interest not only the performance forms of Africa and the various 'beats', but in the tempestuous afterlife of colonialism and post-independence and the different vibrations they carries into the present. In this way, the project of performance and creativity within the diaspora is underwritten by the writers' awareness of the unremitting opposition between the Eurocentric forms of expression demanded by mainstream theatre and the language they need in order to express their lived realities. When asked by the present writer to draft an introduction to his adaption of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Oladipo Agboluaje recounted the inspiration for the project:

> The idea of adapting *Mother Courage* came from Steven Luckie, the then producer of Eclipse Theatre. The previous year, which was their inaugural year, they revived Moon on a Rainbow Shawl. The choice of adaptation was to secure their remit, which was to produce work to tour mid-scale venues in the region. They needed a show that would fill venues of between 400 and 800. Steven [Scott] had seen my first play, *Early Morning*, the year before

> and thought I had the satirical sensibility to adapt *Mother Courage* in a way that would appeal to a popular audience. Because of the many stipulations by the Brecht estate, I was limited in how I could reimagine the story. I read a number of existing adaptations that the Brecht estate permitted to be published and found that they all closely followed the original story. I wrote my version from a newly commissioned translation, and as with those other adaptations I read, I more or less toed the line. Although I felt that given its African slant, I could get away with some liberties in terms of being more playful especially with language, and not thinking about the play as an example of alienation effect. […] I thought a lot about African performance techniques but since the director was not familiar with indigenous performance modes, I decided to stay within the materialism of the play, with criticisms of religion as an opiate of the people, Ngugi-style [Ngugi wa Thiongo]. […] The producers applied to the Brecht Estate to do a run in a London theatre. Permission was granted after the estate's lawyers demanded nine pages of cuts, thus reducing the production to the near equivalent of Brecht in blackface.

Summarizing his approach to the adaptation of the play's themes, the playwright comments:

> I decided to create a fictional West African war and use it as a commentary on the real wars and the local and global politics that caused these conflicts to occur with such depressing regularity.

Significantly, the play adopts the war motif as a way of exploring the tensions between different people and national communities, literally moving the characters across the West African physical and cultural landscapes. Moreover, reading Agboluaje's *Mother Courage* one notices that his project would be not just to adapt Brecht's drama but to define African British playwrights' re-imagining of 'classical' plays as a 're-accentuation' of old dramas. (Mikhail Bakhtin, 1990: 421) Conscious of the contrast between the Brechtian style of *Mother Courage* and his African centred dramatic vision, Agboluaje is forced to develop a counter-cultural space. This is informed by his knowledge of African and Western theatre and an aspiration to use a theatrical language that might express the African identity outside the authorized guidelines by the Brechtian society. Clearly, in their dramas, Agboluaje and other African British writers such as Ade Solanke,[2] are searching for a world they have left behind and the theatre that emerges is caught between the need to signify the Africa the 'there' and the fixed and stable parameters of Western theatre, 'here'. As Joanne Tompkins has noted with reference to post-colonial Shakespearean adaptations, 'revisions of Shakespeare's plays displace an inherited tradition in order to accommodate other cultural traditions'. (1996: 15 - 21)

Throughout the play, Mother Courage and Cook contribute to the discursive voices that present versions of African history (and genealogies) providing a framework for Agboluaje's re-construction of knowledge that connects the characters to the local and the global in relation to issues of conflict and migration. Mother Courage is a woman 'living on the edge' and haunted by the war, who, literally and metaphorically, in the traditional history of West Africa, is a market trader. In one sense, the play concentrates

[2] Ade Solanke's *Pandora's Box* premiered at Arcola theatre, London in 2012.

on the narratives of multiple borders, geopolitical, racial and gendered, within the lives of the characters, the audience, and the global West African community. If borders are physical lines that mark the frontiers, the end and beginning of places or spaces, then metaphorically, Mother Courage and the other characters are always located at the edge, continually encountering other people and their cultures. For example, in Scene 5, '*The war is spreading. Mother Courage's wagon crosses West Africa until arriving at Monrovia*'. (p. 32) Similar to Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Agboluaje's play is always questioning the inflexibility of these frontiers (and spaces) by showing that individually they can be challenged and changed. Indeed, Mother Courage subverts the notion that identity, racial or ethnic, is fixed by offering her controversial fratenisation with men from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a method of naming that not only contravenes African cultural systems but also signifies a layering of multiple identities. In a way, the play is contesting restrictive construction of monocultural or monoethnic African British identity and history. In Scene 1, Mother Courage tries to explain the multiple identities of her family to Sergeant.

SERGEANT: (*Writes*) The Fagburu family.

MOTHER COURAGE: I am the only Fagburu here.

SERGEANT: Are these not your children?

MOTHER COURAGE: Ehen[3]? (*Pointing to* EKET) My eldest, there, is Eket Messu-Essien. His father's a French mercenary. Francois was always telling Eket that he's an assimilé, a Franco-phoney. He wanted

[3] So?

to name him Leopold. Sounded too Belgian for my liking. I was with a Calabar man then. I could have married Francois but he was driven out of Nigeria.

SERGEANT: Why?

MOTHER COURAGE: The frogs in our area disappeared. Our neighbours accused Francois of hunting them to make white man's juju. (*Points to her other children*) Anyway, they are birds of different feathers.

SERGEANT: They all have different names? (*To* OPOKU) So your father's from Lapland, *abi*?

MOTHER COURAGE: From Ghana, by the name of Ajayi. Although everybody called him Charlie.

OPOKU *smiles and nods, likewise* NGOZI.

SERGEANT: If his father is Ghanaian, why in Eshu's name is he called Ajayi?

MOTHER COURAGE: Sergeant, I don't want to say it but it's obvious you did not do well in school. I was with my Yoruba countryman. The boy takes after him.

SERGEANT: How can the boy take after him when he's not his father?

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Crooks her finger*) Asking question. I call him Opoku. (*Points to* NGOZI) That's Ngozi Enwerem. She's half-Igbo.

SERGEANT: You have a United Nations' family.

MOTHER COURAGE: Yes, oh. My wagon and I have seen the world.

(pp. 4-5)

In the context of her earlier statement about her family, 'they are birds of the same feather', she presents the view that her relationships with men means the thin lines of identity exist between people, and the children are a metaphor for the new hybrid African communities. Thus, in her own way, Mother Courage affirms the existence of pre-colonial complex inter-ethnic and racial relationships and rejects the exclusionist practices, which define lives and people differently that Agboluaje is anxious to explore in the play. If the fixation with race, religion and ethnic origins is so essentialist it destroys people's ability to live harmoniously and build peaceful communities, then what one has lost is the sense of understanding that recognizes history and values, and uses the past and difference, without being constrained by them at the expense of forging new relations and identities.

The re-wording of the text into a more West African English language register, demonstrate the ways in which Agboluaje actions his 'accentuation'; thus, while this *Mother Courage* remains a Western play, it is affected by the worldview of the writer/producer, and by extension, the performers. The play shows that performance

travels and ‘dialogues’ with different cultures, forms, geographical locations, and audiences in Africa and its diaspora. A theatre critic took exception to not only the Africanisation of the language but the cast’s enunciation, stating, ‘There are two minor problems. The cast have adopted the think Nigerian accents so enthusiastically that some of the good lines are lost and impenetrable to audiences.’ (Gail Cooper, 2004) The implications of Cooper’s assessment are clear. Forget that the play has been reworked and adapted to address a multicultural audience. Talk to the traditional (white) English-going audience. The same theatre critic also found Carmen Munroe’s (Mother Courage) singing unattractive and forced: ‘Carmen Munroe’s singing voice lacks something: she seems unable to decide whether to speak the songs rhythmically, or attempt to sing out of her range’. This criticism echoed the bias of Europeans about African/Black voices, particularly springing by their inability to appreciate ‘the way Africans treat their rhythm’ (Givewell Munyaradzi and Webster Zimidzi, 2012: 1). Thus, as European ‘classics’ are performed outside mainstream theatres by non-White performers they experience changes comparable to those by migrants, making ‘routes’ and creating new ‘roots’ and meanings on previously untrodden paths; significantly, this ‘side stream’ theatre transforms into the other main stream. In *Mother Courage*, where he reworks and poaches the performance language of Brecht, creating new dialogues within existing frameworks of Brechtian theatre, Agboluaje constructs an African version that appears authentic but simultaneously has a particular artist quality, written in a way to underline its distinctive aesthetics or strands. This familiar style of Agboluaje’s theatre, learned from a reflective understanding of African theatre styles, drama and linguistic expression, is what people in wartime continuously act.

Once positioned outside mainstream British theatre, Agboluaje is one of the African British playwrights who have created their own 'stream' bringing to the play attractive performance values, practices, and a social. Their 'outsider' consciousness determinedly employs specific locations to examine post-colonial relations of power and identity observing issues from insider/outsider locations. In the case of Agboluaje's play, Brecht's original text is displaced by a new reality, and similar to the diaspora where the cultures merge, it creates an in-between space from which, questions about identity, nation, myth and the meaning of performance emerge. 'Re-accentuating' the play, Agboluaje acknowledges its history while at the same time reviewing it with critical energy that connects it to a wider artistic level, or, to influences and insinuations outside its original theatrical frame of reference. This ability to work both outside and inside the framework of Western and African theater demonstrates the African British playwright's need to juxtapose or transpose dramas, which audience placed in the 'in-between space' away from Africa, find both familiar and strange. As a re-reading of a 'classical' Western text, this *Mother Courage* can be examined effectively alongside Roy Williams' contemporary version of Sophocles' *Antigone* and Wole Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* (1977), another African response to Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), itself an adaptation of John Gray's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), and in addition, Joanitta Bewulira-Wandera's *Maama Nalukalala Ne'zzade Lye* (Mother Courage and Her Children), the only translation of the play into an African language. While *Opera Wonyosi*, adapted to the African post-colonial political landscape, evidences Brechtian influences on African writing, parodies African leaders, Williams' *Antigone* concentrates

on Black British inner city gangesterism and their effect on the individual. Collectively, what Sandra Richards observes *about Opera Wonyosi* is applicable to all these plays: 'the distance between audience and dramatic events is virtually non-existent, and highly impassioned reactions […] are the only plausible responses' (1989: 173). For, not only does Agboluaje play adopt Soyinka's imaginative approach to reworking and adapting Western dramatic works to comment on the contemporary African condition after colonialism; it also appears to be based on his approach of presenting an African British theatre that analyses the material conditions of individuals who are trapped by the baggage of contemporary African/African British experiences. In their search they discover spaces in the frameworks and syntax constructed by previous artists, similar to the mystifying figure of Mother Courage, who is always presented occupying the borderlines, on the edge of life, pressed against the boundaries of the space the marks her position. She demonstrates that colonial history is alive in the present informing and affecting the choices people make; hence, the oral and visual style he adopts is a way of informing the audience that their shared past still exists although in Western history it is non-existent. For instance, in Scene 6, this is underlined by Mother Courage and Chaplain's brief discussion of the cause of Field Marshall Jigawa as both pathetic and farcical.

> Mother Courage: Poor man. The general with a thousand gold watches, custom-made to match his medals. Although I'm told he'd never seen a battlefield in his life.
>
> Chaplain: But they've made today a national holiday. They said he died gallantly defending the Union.

Mother Courage: On his Xbox. His son was whitewashing him on level 4. He wanted to go down to level 1 but the son refused. Petulantly, he went to switch off the television, tripped over the wires and went headfirst into the TV set.

Chaplain: So it's true what they say about video game violence. Everything from the West is not the best, eh?

(pp. 39 – 40)

The play confirms that the African British writer does not reinvent theatre/performance but works on acquired theatrical meanings and explanations. Within this play, intertwined, layered multiple identities and the afterlife of colonialism are presented through dramatic techniques such as intertextuality and a complex network of characters that enhance the significant themes and identities. Thus, the layeredness of the text shows how Agboluaje has, as a post-colonial writer, combined and mixed the Western 'classical' text with African theatrical elements to create a text that belongs to both of them and is in dialogue with their theatrical and aesthetic values. Generally, as well as noting the struggles associated with living in the African diaspora, and pan-Africanism, thematically he questions notions of ethnicity and race. Indeed, the reference to Mother Courage's children as people of mixed parentage belonging to white Europeans and black people shows Agboluaje's awareness of the strong resonance of his play to the concerns of many writers of African descent such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Kwame Kwei-Armah and Roy Williams. Agboluaje's *Mother Courage*, largely

in another English language register, represents one of the only two major reworking of the play that have been undertaken by African playwrights; therefore, it stands as a response to Western performance models on behalf of minority ethnic cultures, which still lie in the shadow of mainstream British theatre. As a subaltern project, it engages in dialogue with conservative theatre traditions all the time breathing new life into the Brechtian form and opening it up to new ways of performance.

The play explores archives of collective memory through Mother Courage and Radio (VO), which informs and comments on events in the conflict, a charcter inserted into the adaptation by Agboluaje, partly to replace the 'sound of a jew's-harp' in Brecht's original script. Radio (VO) broadcasts draw our attention to his comments on the role of the media in contemporary conflicts and the issues he is examining. For instance, at the beginning of Scene 1, Radio (VO) announces the preparations for a 'counter-offensive against the Rebel Dancing Hyenas Revolutionary Forces' (p. 1). 'It is only right that children do their air share of killing, since they will gain the most from the peace to come' (p. 1), the Radio quotes Chief of Armed Forces Field Marshall Jigawa of the West African Union of Independent States, linking contemporary African warlords with the inhuman practice of using child soldiers. The fascination with titles, famous people's names, obsession, and self-aggrandizement is continually evoked through radio pronouncement as well as comments by other characters. This is most evident in Scene 6, when Radio (VO) announces:

> Today is Africa's saddest day as we bury its trues son. Field Marshal Jigawa was the greatest warrior the black race has produced. Greater than Shaka,

> Toussanit d'Ouverture and Mike Tyson. A total Africa, his favourite musician was Britney Spears. To mark his passing, this station will play his favourite song, 'Hit Me Baby One More Time', 24-7 for the next forty days. Rest in peace, Mammoth of Africa.

Agboluaje also uses linguistic and thematic devices to pursue his concern in the contemporary African cultures and identities, tensions, and politics of post-independent West Africa. Through these methods, the play invokes stories, memories, versions of intercontinental travel and geography that dialogues with geographies/cultures imposed by colonialism. In capturing the sense of immorality and imbedding it in the play's discourse, Agboluaje directs caustic satire on Africa's warlords and sets the tone for the play's interest in people's collective memory and its connection to contemporary. What this play achieves, while blending the satirical and serious, is the recreation of complex political and cultural debates in a performance medium. It engages his audience (African and non-African) with various concepts underpinning nation, culture, identity, but achieves this through framing the play within a familiar Brechtian style that self-consciously references an African performance tradition. Thus, rather than create a 'blackened' *Mother Courage*, Agboluaje constructs produces a play that actively creates humour and relationships contesting fixed adaptations demanded by the copyright owners.

The depth of the reference in this scene indicates an understanding of the tensions within post-colonial West Africa's complex and fragmentary history embedded at the heart of this drama where the aggregate effect of the play is not linear since it allows

the audience to engage with various inter-related issues. Apart from allusions to West African market women through the exploration and disentanglement of a classical legend, Mother Courage, there are resonances with African countries where political structures have become complex, and war, politics and corruption are intertwined like histories of the indigenous people who 'live there'. For example, through the insertions of the Radio (VO) spokesman, pidgin English, and non-European names, he draws us critically into the many interlaced layers of stories of contemporary warfare that is destroying the communities. Thus, if five different people watch *Mother Courage*, they will have five different stories about what really happened, and the significance it has today. When will the warring factions take responsibility for their deeds? The present tyrannical systems represented by Chief of Armed Forces Field Marshal Jigawa and Field Marshal General Adolf Hammer (Scene 8) and General Mensah heading the armies, are guarded by soldiers, such as Sergeant, Recruiter, Quarter Master, Older Soldier and Boy Soldier, Soldiers 1, and Soldier 2, who from part of the marauding packs of UN peace keepers and rebels. These resent peasants but demonstrate a passion for war, the military, and looting; the army uniform is the only route to power and wealth. When Mother Courage attempts to block the Recruiter from taking her son into the army, the Sergeant states: 'Madam, a uniform is the quickest way to a Presidency. What kind of mother are you, denying your son the opportunity of becoming Head-of-state?' (p. 6) At the beginning of Scene 2, Radio (VO) announces:

> It's two years since Jigawa's conscription drive. The war shows no sign of ending. General Mensah of the West Africa Forces refutes accusations of genocide. Questions are being asked bout Mensah's Operation Starve and

> Shoot. Mass graves are being discovered everywhere. Atrocities are being committed by both sides in this increasingly bloody war.

Moreover, later the General invites Eket to share a bottle of White Horse whisky with him because 'I want to hear how you ventilated those farmers and captured their cattle' (p. 13). What is being reflected upon and questioned is the post-colonial present and many other issues dramatized through the interlinking narratives of Mother Courage, Cook, Chaplain, the Old Soldier and the Boy Soldier. This is demonstrated most clearly in the scene when Mother Courage 'The Song of Capitulation'. She teaches the Young Soldier a life long lesson: 'Common people can endure anything. Why else do we allow dictators to grow like weeds?' (p. 25). Later she comments, 'When your CO initiated 'Operation Mine Harvest' and you mined all the farms you didn't complain then. Of course, you didn't bargain for famine. Now hunger is wiring[4] you while your CCO grows fat on food relief. He thought you would have been far from here by now. But the Union pushed you back into your minefields' (p. 25). This scene underlines issues of political tension, resistance, and causes and consequences; and while the Young Soldiers responds by asserting his unsustainable courage, 'I am a man of action. I can't stand injustice', Mother Courage notes, 'Common people can endure anything. Why else do we allow dictators to grow like weeds?' The Clerk comes to the waiting room to find out the source of the noise the Boy Soldier denies that he is the one who has been causing a commotion as if to prompt Mother Courage's rhetorical question, which is significant to the meaning of the play. Interestingly, this evokes a specific response to the chaotic post-colonial climate and the internecine wars that have taken place beginning in the late twentieth century: 'How can there be a revolution when even the revolutionaries

[4] Slang for 'You are dying of hunger'.

obey the oppressors?' (p. 36). Yet, within this scene, Mother Courage capitulates, for business reasons, her rights to challenge the oppressors because: 'Business people don't complain. It spoils business' (p. 36). Some members of this war community reject Mother Courage's complex consciousness since they see it as a denial of their identity based on fundamental religious and ethnic beliefs.

Chaplain: (*To a woman he has carried in*) When you knew there was fighting, why did you stay?

Farmer's Wife: The farm.

Mother Courage: Oho! You don't want your put our own down but you want me to release my own. Never!

First Soldier: They are Moslems. God is punishing them.

Mother Courage: And that is their main concern? Their farm is gone.

Second Soldier: Oh no, they're not Moslems. They are Christians like us.

First Soldier: Our bombs aren't smart enough to tell the difference.

Mother Courage: They all look African to me. (p. 38)

Mother Courage's compassionate views of people in distress and the notion of sameness highlights how the play critiques contemporary religious fundamentalist wars between Muslims and Christians and it indicates the changes taking place throughout communities in Africa and its diaspora.

While in some contexts Mother Courage may be seen as a profiteer, she is also a victim of corrupt, bloodthirsty men who see the war as a prospect to loot, pillage, rape and enrich themselves. The dialogic relationship between the transient rag-tag armies and

military war lords of Brecht's Mother Courage and today's post-colonial warring factions is underlined by Mother Courage's comments while serving alcohol to her customers on the day of General Jigawa's funeral.

> A reliable source told me that the General was getting worried about unrest among his troops. They had not been paid for months. He was blowing them story that it was a patriotic war and that they should do it for free. When that didn't washy, he told them it was a religious war. When they prayed that he should die, he said it was an ethnic war. They asked which tribe he came from and it became a patriotic war all over again. (pp. 40 – 41)

Moreover, as Courage states in Scene 6, 'He wanted to leave his name in stone for generations to remember. I hear he'd commissioned sculptors for his statues to be placed all over the region. For a big man achieving greatness is the only thing to live for.'(p. 41) When, following this statement, the Soldier announces to Chaplain and Mother Courage, 'The war's back on and duty calls', there follows about the iniquities of war.

> Clerk: You mean we'll never have peace? I'm from Togo. I'm fed up and I want to go home. Otherwise, I'll trek across the Sahara Desert and find my way to Europe.
>
> Chaplain: You can't have peace without war> That's all I'm saying.
>
> Soldier (Sings): Put down your counter on a square,
>
> No matter, we'll be far from here'
>
> The war's back on and duty calls.
>
> One last ablution. Off we go

Where we're dying no one knows

……..

Clerk: You can live without war but you cannot live without peace.

Chaplain: True, but wear and peace come together – no need to purchase them separately. The thing is, you can do in war what you can do in peace. (p. 42)

The pessimistic nature of the play emerges in various scenes, but particularly in Scene 8 when 'peace threatens to ruin Mother Courage's business' (p. 45) and Ashewo returns to the camp, and finally encounters her old foe, 'Peter the Pipe' (p.51). Ashewo's states that her Colonel husband had died spark off a conversation about the trade in 'conflict diamonds' also reminding the audience: 'You know what they say: a diamond is for conflict, not just for Christmas'. A further sense of immorality and corruption arises through Ashewo's comments: 'The price fluctuated with each UN rsolution against the selling of conflict diamonds. Trust European businessmen to know how to get around them. And leaders who know where their bread is buttered.' Mother Courage's indignant response to Ashewo captures the people's exasperation with the military: 'Let's not badmouth colonels. They make money like babies make shit'. In this overtly political play, the audience cannot avoid the past as it emerges into the present exposed in the war zone and army camps. Contemporary Africa (Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Benin, Burkina Faso) is haunted by Europe and the reminders that appear are not related to the past but present day issues; the signs are not of the colonial past but of present day issues. For, at the centre of the play are a set of issues that shift away from Brecht's original script to include Agboluaje's pre-occupations. For

example: corruption, immigrants, occupation but marauding soldiers and peacekeepers, CNN exploited by the fighters for publicity, 'Camouflage Condoms' used by soldiers sexually exploiting the conquered, NGOs and the Red Cross, and the plunder of mineral resources to buy luxurious goods such as Rolex watches and Xboxes. As with Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* where characters parody or parallel politicians, various parallels are drawn between the warlords, Foday Sanko of Sierra Leone, Charles Taylor of Liberia and Field Marshall Jigawa, Genral Mensah and their fighters while still sharing with Brecht's original play a critical view of war and its impact on the communities. The play works touches a number of themes including corruption, ethnic violence, migration, NGOism, and the international media's influence on conflict, collectively seen through the prism of two late twentieth century West African regional conflicts.

In response to the Clerk's threat that, if he cannot go home to Togo, , the Chaplain states, 'You can't have peace without war.' (p. 42) The plays shows that part of the function of African British theatre is the implicit and explicit critique of the consequences of colonization and post-colonial conflicts in Africa, and migration as exemplified by Agboluaje's *Mother Courage*. So when, in Scene 6, Soldier sings, 'The war's back on and duty' it is not surprise Clerk rejects a resumption of his role as Clerk to the Colonel protesting that the war has lost its purpose and his only choice is migration to the North: 'I'm from Togo. I'm fed up and I want to go home. […] I'll trek across the Sahara Desert and find my way to Europe'. (p. 42) Perhaps, in the scene, the words, 'You can't have peace without war', uttered by the Chaplain offer an additional clue to the play's message concerning the cyclic violent conflicts. 'New images in literature are very often

created through a re-accentuating of old images, by translating them from one accentual register to another (from the comic plane to the tragic, for instance, or the other way around'. (1990: 421) In this paper, it has been my contention that in Agboluaje's *Mother Courage*, and indeed in dramas by Africa and African/Black British writers, Soyinka, Solanke and Femi Osofisan, the post-colonial play is an attempt to critically engage in dialogue with the afterlife of colonialism and migration. This play is a major contribution to the continuing expansion of the African British theatre, particularly in the way it reinscribes African performance aesthetics that aims to re-imagine canonical dramas, assert 'outsider' cultural authority, and establish a new 'stream' alongside mainstream theatre in Britain.

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